

Handel's *Messiah* on Easter Sunday

by Dennis H. Speed

April 4—The Manhattan Project was first proposed by *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche during the preparation of a November, 2014 musical celebration of the birthday of the “poet of freedom,” Friedrich Schiller. The Manhattan Project took a major step forward this Easter Sunday, March 27. The Schiller Institute New York City Community Chorus performed Parts Two and Three of *Messiah* by composer George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), in Brooklyn at the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church.

In a discussion the next day among the LaRouche Political Action Committee's Policy Committee, Diane Sare, the chorus co-founder and choral director, reported on the performance of the chorus of the evening before: “This was done at a very important Catholic Church in Brooklyn, which historically was founded in the 1850s, and was the area of longshoreman and port activity, and Italian and Irish immigrants. And we had a full orchestra and chorus, and it's a continuing growth

of this choral process that we've been carrying on in Manhattan.

“There were about 400-450 people in attendance, which is saying something because the church as it stands now, is in a semi-industrial area. The church was actually scheduled to be shut down. And the priest made a point at the beginning, when he gave the opening remarks for the event, of speaking a little bit about the history of this church, which is quite beautiful. And he said, ‘Can you imagine closing a church which is also a work of art? We couldn't allow that to happen.’ And then he described what each of the stained-glass windows was, and the scene of Noah and the Ark, which was very important for a port area. In fact the ceiling of the church is designed to look like the inside of a boat. So it's a beautiful wood arch. And people in the audience were commenting that the acoustics were quite extraordinary, that you could hear every voice perfectly, even at the very back of the church.



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On Easter Sunday the New York Schiller Institute Community Chorus performed Parts Two and Three of George Frideric Handel's Messiah at the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church in Brooklyn, New York, March 27, 2016.

“We had many people who signed up to join the chorus—actually maybe 40 or 50—who expressed immediate interest in immediately joining the chorus that we’re organizing in Brooklyn, as a result of this. We discovered that some of the musicians there have collaborated with old friends of LaRouche, like Norbert Brainin (the late first violinist of the great Amadeus Quartet). And it just, again, opens up a whole new potential for what we can do in Manhattan and environs with this choral process.”

The Spirit Behind the Music

As reported in the program for the concert, “The church has become well known in New York City in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in 2012 for its role in assisting the nearby community during that crisis.... Church pastor Father Claudio Antecini, interviewed by *The Tablet* newspaper three months after the onset of Hurricane Sandy, said of the calamity ‘that during times of extreme duress, such as during a hurricane, there is only one thought on many people’s minds: How to help others. Visitation Parish helped about 4,000 people from the neighborhood who came looking for food and supplies.’ That is the same spirit that characterizes Handel’s *Messiah*, first performed in Dublin, Ireland in 1742. Handel demanded and successfully fought to direct that all proceeds from his oratorio’s premiere should go to benefit the cities’ debtors’ prisons, the Mercers’ Hospital, and the Charitable Infirmary.”

Policy Committee member Rachel Brinkley, who had sung in the chorus of the Sunday event, responded to Sare: “It was very interesting to actually perform the end of Handel’s *Messiah*. I didn’t know, or I never quite understood the piece as a whole. But generally, this idea of splitting it up gets rid of the section at the end, and Handel’s composition of this particular piece really, I think, did intend for people to stay through to the end. Not just stand up and leave at the ‘Hallelujah’ chorus; that’s beautiful, the ‘Hallelujah.’ But the end, which ends with ‘Amen.’ and the principle of immortality, is much more important, when it says, ‘The trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.’ And this particular performance, I thought, had a clear dialogue between the soloist and the chorus, echoing and producing these changes between mortality and immortality. So, it was very beautiful.

“And then also, the question of Handel’s connection

to Leibniz was also something that I wasn’t aware of before this performance. But it turns out that Handel was sent to London, essentially by Leibniz. He was hired by the court at Hanover and sent to London, to be a liaison between Queen Anne and Sophie in Hanover. So, Handel went to London with the idea of bringing Leibniz’s ideas there, and his composition of *Messiah* was after the death of Princess Caroline, whom he had worked with, who was Leibniz’s student. And he was inspired by his work with her, and wrote this piece. So it was definitely a work for history to be performing this right now.”

There is a Classical cultural method being applied to attack the madness of the present state of American society in these actions. The Schiller Institute New York City Community Chorus was founded in December 2014 with a sing-along performance of Handel’s *Messiah* dedicated to unifying the city of New York in the wake of the Staten Island grand jury decision in the suffocation death of Eric Garner. Just over a year later, and in this Easter celebration, there were more than 100 performers, including a 31-piece orchestra and 80 singers led by conductor John Sigerson, the Music Director of the Schiller Institute.

Sigerson is the co-author of the groundbreaking work, *A Manual On Registration and Tuning*, published by the Schiller Institute in 1988. He is the nation’s leading proponent of orchestral performance at the Verdi tuning of A=432 cycles per second, significantly lower than the tuning practice of most major orchestras in Europe and the United States.

Sigerson’s conducting of *Messiah* is heavily influenced by his studies of the work of conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, one of history’s greatest musicians, and the greatest conductor of the Twentieth Century. In discussion the next day, Sigerson suggested that people listen to Furtwängler performances of Handel’s *Concerti Grossi* to gain a more introspective insight into the highest quality of Handel’s compositional method, the which is sometimes missed because of the tendency to think of Handel as merely a “festive” composer. It was the attempt to present *Messiah* as one singular idea, as opposed to a collection of “greatest hits,” that was the distinction of the performance.

Soloists Gudrun Bühler (soprano), Mary Phillips (mezzo-soprano), Everett Suttle (tenor), and Phillip Cutlip (bass) allowed the long-line intent to be punctuated by drama, fire, and reflection through Handel’s arias. More work is required on the recitative/aria rela-



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Gudrun Bühler, soprano



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Philip Cutlip, bass-baritone

tionship and its realization between symphony, soloist, and chorus.

Maybe It's the Tuning

Of the chorus itself, Sigerson reported a conversation between himself and another musician who remarked on their exceptional singing. "He was amazed—he sings in other choruses in New York City—how well our chorus stays in tune! In all the other choruses everybody's going flat! [I said to him] 'Maybe it's the tuning; also we strive for *bel canto* and not pushing the voice.' [Then he asked me] 'Do you need an assistant?'"

The conclusion of the piece, "Worthy Is the Lamb," followed by "Amen," an intricate fugue and one of Handel's greatest compositional moments, lifts the chorus to the level of single soloist. While many of the choruses of *Messiah* are impressive, the concluding "Amen," precisely because of the absence of text, other than that one word of simultaneous submission, celebration, and recognition of universal law, is the most liberating moment of the piece, which is best experienced as a whole. Sigerson announced at the end of the discussion on Monday that he believed that the chorus should perform the whole of *Messiah*, all three sections, at the end of the year. Whole *Messiah* performances, while done, are quite rare; a *Messiah* done at the proper "Verdi tuning" is generally unavailable to the public, and would almost never be done for the non-"professional concert-going" audiences of New York City that Sare, Sigerson, and the New York City Community Chorus seek to reach.

These performances aim to rejoin a campaign for

cultural literacy and true cultural freedom that was taken up in New York City nearly three decades ago. As the Easter program reported, "On April 9, 1988, at a conference on 'Music and Classical Aesthetics' at the Casa di Verdi in Milan, Italy, the Schiller Institute launched a worldwide campaign to restore the scientific tuning pitch of the Classical composers from Bach through Verdi, of Middle C=256 Hz ('A' no higher than 432 Hz).

"Five years later, on April 8, 1993, the famous Italian tenor Carlo Bergonzi, a participant at the earlier conference (which included Lyndon and [Schiller Institutes founder] Helga LaRouche, as well as Italian opera luminaries soprano Renata Tebaldi and baritone Piero Capuccilli) established, in a seminar held at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, the superiority, through demonstrations with male and female singers, of the Verdi tuning over the arbitrarily high 'modern' tuning of A=440 Hz, and even higher. Bergonzi stated, 'It is particularly important to raise the question of tuning in connection with *bel canto* technique, since today's high tuning misplaces all register shifts, and makes it very difficult for a singer to have the sound float above the breath. When an F-sharp becomes a G... Everything is misplaced a half-step, and the technique fails.'"

It was Lyndon LaRouche who insisted to colleagues over thirty years ago that the advancement of music, or even the preservation of Classical compositional method, required the restoration of the "human tuning" system of C=256. In 1990, conductor Anthony Morss conducted a concert opera version of Beethoven's *Fidelio* at the proper tuning, nearly three years before the Bergonzi interview. Maestro Morss recently retired



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Mary Phillips, mezzo-soprano, and Everett Suttle, tenor, singing the duet: “O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55-56).

from directing two orchestras in New Jersey, having conducted for over 55 years throughout the world, and accompanied soprano Joan Sutherland and others of the world’s greatest singers.

Since retiring last year, Maestro Morss has been a member of the New York City Community Chorus and sings in the bass section. The chorus’s accompanist, pianist/harpsichordist Cheryl Berard, is an accomplished recitalist in her own right. These and others of the best musicians in New York stand and sit side by side with people who have often only recently began to sing,—yet who, through a shared mission to impart beauty to an America marred by the ugliness of the madness of its politics, produced a *Messiah* that was not merely competent, but in some instances inspired.

The concert notes describing the Schiller Institute chorus, written by Diane Sare, explain why this is possible. “The question of ‘our humanity’ is the most important question facing the American population today. If you were to presume that the current pack of Presidential candidates and the quality of their debates were representative of ‘humanity,’ you might place an urgent call to China and request to board the nearest spacecraft in search of superior species in some other galaxy!”

Unity of Effect

Sare continued, “Happily, it is the view of Friedrich Schiller that such low points in our history do not define our species, but that we are capable of better, and that the role of the artist is to inspire us to act in a truly human, as distinct from bestial, manner. It is to this end that in

October 2014, Lyndon LaRouche launched his ‘Manhattan Project,’ of which this chorus is a part. LaRouche maintained that the legacy of Alexander Hamilton and of his extraordinary efforts, *from Manhattan*, to unify our young nation through the American Revolution and the American System of economy based on the creativity of our citizens, is the crucial source of identity of the United States.” It is to the idea of the reproduction of great ideas for all of humanity through establishing a *unity of effect*—whether in

politics, art, or science—that the chorus is devoted.

In his Saturday dialogue with the Manhattan Project held at the Beacon Hotel after the concert, Lyndon LaRouche was asked a question by a participant in Sunday’s concert, who contended that he thought that the performance had a resonating effect in the thinking and organizing of all those that experienced it. Part of the question was stated: “. . . I know in your book, *The Science of Christian Economy*, you talk about how it takes creativity to make an original, valid, scientific discovery, but also, to transmit that to others, you need a certain level of creativity. And essentially what we’re doing or discussing here today [the removal of Obama from office through impeachment], is to do the impossible. But if you really think about it, it’s actually very simple; it’s just that people *think* that it’s impossible, and they act on that belief. And I think that if we were consistently operating on the same level of creativity that we did . . . expressed in this concert, we would easily win. So my question is, where does this level of creativity really come from? And how can we, as a group, have more of that?”

LaRouche replied: “There are many answers to that question. The Italian answer is probably one of the best answers of all. I spent a good deal, a quarter of my time in Europe, in particular, with Italian figures. Some of them were musicians, and people like that, so I had a lot of Italian friends, and most of the Italian friends would fit in the same category as the people who performed at the recent event there.

“The people are drawn to that because intrinsically

in the religious service, there's an implicit direction,—and never underrate implicit direction. Implicit direction, which most people, you know, where they sing religious songs, most of them don't know what they are doing. They have an understanding about it. They have a reason why they are impressed by this. They enjoy this. They have a certain sense of comfort. And I think the greatest things in religious behavior that you would get from those locations, are just exactly that.

"They don't know what they are adapting to. They don't know fully what the purpose of their action is, but they get a resonance of something there which is bigger than they are! And they sing for the sake of singing for something which is bigger than they are.

"And what happened in that particular case, and the one earlier last year [December 19-20], was the same thing. Why do people go into these religious formalities in these things? Because they are seeking to find *home*. They're seeking to find the experience of life which they can call their *immortal home*. That's what they want. And when you can give them that, or suggest how they could do that, they're happy.

"The usual stuff about religion—most people who are religious don't know anything about what religion is. They get a grab at it; they get something, a feeling

about it. But what it's really about is the devotion of a human being's *life*: The meaning of the life of any human being, is what does the life of that human being contribute to the benefit of mankind, *permanently*?

"Mankind, all human beings die. Children die. The greatest children have outlived their parents, and what they became gave us the richness of what that child had accomplished.

"So there's a process in mankind, where the action of mankind under certain conditions actually promotes and insists upon an improvement into what mankind *will be*, in the course of their life, the *meaning* of their life. Can you say, 'Well I'm going to be successful, I'm going to get money, I'm going to get this, I'm going to...,'—is that going to make a difference for you? If you're going to *die*, will that make a difference for you?

"Or if you could live a life which can mean something, and when you can discover things in yourself which are creative and great, you may not understand why you are doing that, but you experience that, and therefore you say, 'I'm not going to go against it. This is something I don't fully understand. I believe in it, but I don't fully understand it. And I would hope that my children will understand that better.'

"And that's what this thing was about."

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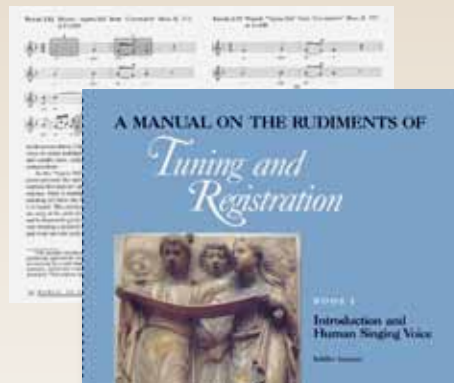
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—Norbert Brainin, founder and first violinist, Amadeus Quartet

"Without any doubt an excellent initiative. It is particularly important to raise the question of tuning in connection with *bel canto* technique, since today's high tuning misplaces all register shifts, and makes it very difficult for a singer to have the sound float above the breath. . . . What is true for the voice, is also true for instruments."

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